

# Memorandum

**TO:** BUILDING BETTER  
TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

**FROM:** Katy Allen  
James R. Helmer

**SUBJECT:** ABOVE GROUND UTILITY  
CABINETS

**DATE:** 05-26-05

Approved 

Date 5/30/05

## RECOMMENDATION

Accept status report on above ground utility cabinets.

## BACKGROUND

The Department of Transportation (DOT) along with the Department of Public Works (DPW) have pursued efforts to develop new design standards for traffic signal cabinets and private utility cabinets. The goal is to reduce the physical and visual presence of cabinets in order to allow for a more pedestrian friendly and attractive environment.

In April 2002, the City Council initially directed staff to pursue new design standards for traffic signal cabinets. A progress report on the topic was provided in April 2003. This report summarizes the current status of utility cabinet issues, as requested by the Building Better Transportation Committee.

## ANALYSIS

### Traffic Signal Cabinets

Currently, the City utilizes two separate cabinets for each intersection controlled by a traffic signal. These include a cabinet for the traffic signal controller and a separate cabinet for the electrical service and meter. Attached is a photo of the two cabinets.

DOT staff has been working with a cabinet manufacturer to develop a "hybrid" cabinet that would combine the controller and service cabinets and reduce the overall size of the cabinet. Although the manufacturer was able to combine the cabinets into a single "hybrid" type cabinet, they were unable to reduce the overall size significantly. The development of a small hybrid cabinet faces other challenges as noted below:

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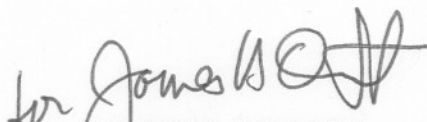
- Advances in traffic signal technology are creating a move for larger cabinets to accommodate equipment for features such as signal coordination, video detection, and monitoring cameras.
- A combined signal controller and electrical service cabinet requires approval by PUC and would be resisted by producers of stand-alone electrical service cabinets.
- Not enough cities have shared San José's interest in smaller and combined cabinets to create a strong enough market to move the industry in this direction.
- Due to ongoing budget reductions and other Council priorities, San José has limited resources to pursue the strong advocacy needed on this issue to make further progress.

Private Utility Cabinets

Private utility companies, specifically PG&E, have standardized on the use of above-ground utility cabinets to house their equipment. PG&E is asserting that additional costs to underground these vaults are now to be borne by the municipality. Department of Public Works staff is continuing their efforts to advocate for the use of underground vaults whenever possible.

Staff will be available to discuss this matter further at the Committee meeting.

  
KATY ALLEN  
for Director, Public Works Department

  
JAMES R. HELMER  
Director of Transportation

Attachment

**Photo of Traffic Signal and Electrical Service Cabinets**

